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ABSTRACT

The role of the English department chair was studied through a national survey of departments in universities with student enrollments between 5,000 and 12,000. Attention was directed to: academic rank, length of term, how selected, number of teachers in the department, salary, fringe benefits, teaching load, and duties. Of the 150 questionnaires mailed, 64% of the chairs responded. Nearly 100 responses were reported and analyzed. Findings include: chairs tended to administer departments ranging in size from 8 to 61 faculty members during the academic year; the term of office tended to run for a 3-year period and in most situations, chairs may be reelected an unlimited number of times; 71% of the department chairs were professors and 23% were associate professors; the average salary of an English department chair was $42,985 with a range of $21,200 to $56,000; all chairs reported that they received a reduction in teaching load ranging from 25% to 100%; additional salary was provided to about 56% of the department chairs on the basis of faculty size; and while almost half of the chairs received some supplemental compensation for performing chair duties, in most cases the supplement was less than $4,000. Recommendations concerning workload and compensation of chairs are offered. (SW)

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University Department Chairs: "Who Are We?"

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ABSTRACT

In order to determine what the role of the Department Chair ~~has~~ is in universities, a national survey was conducted by a research team from Eastern Washington University's Department of Education. Questionnaires were sent to persons holding that position in all universities in the United States with student enrollments between 5,000 and 12,000. Specifically, the survey asked recipients questions regarding academic rank, length of term, how selected, number of teachers in the department, salary, teaching load, duties, and funds available for program development. Of the 150 questionnaires sent out, 64 per cent of the Chairs responded. Although, all of the questions were not answered, many chairs offered helpful comments. These responses reveal that there is variation in interpretation about the role, responsibilities, compensation, or selection of the individuals who function as Chair. Results of the nearly 100 responses are reported and analyzed. Recommendations are included.

University Department Chairs: "Who Are We?"

What does it mean to be the English Department Chair? Does it mean that one has many and varied responsibilities with little reward and recognition? Could it mean that those who hold this position feel ambiguous as to what the job entails?

Since every university has an English Department and every department needs a chairperson, it seems appropriate to investigate who and what this person is. Several rather general studies have been conducted on the subject of department chairs. The role conflict of the chairs, whether they are more administration or faculty, has been discussed by Gerald Falk (1979). He found that there is no agreement on what the duties of department chairpersons actually are, and that although the faculty expect that person to represent them, the fact that he or she is an administrator causes conflict and separation. Knight and Holen (1985) call the chairperson an "important administrative position" and study these leaders' characteristics and performance. Their concern is that department chairpersons are given responsibility for administration without having been trained for such positions. J. D. Troutman (1979) has produced an extensive "Analysis of the Position of Department Chairmen at York College of Pennsylvania." He attempted to determine whether the chair is more involved as instructor, administrator, or dean of students, concluding that this person is responsible for departmental, academic, budgetary, faculty, and student affairs, as well as external communications and office management. While these studies are informative, a survey of the literature reveals

little information regarding function and compensation of Chairs.

Purpose and Procedure

In order to determine what the role of the English Department Chair is in universities, a national survey was conducted during the summer of 1986 by a research team from Eastern Washington University's Department of Education. Questionnaires were sent to English Department Chairs in all universities in the United States with student enrollments between 5,000 and 12,000. Specifically, the survey asked recipients questions regarding role, responsibilities, cooperation, selection, academic rank, length of term, number of faculty, teaching load, and funds for program development. Of the 150 questionnaires sent out, 64 per cent of the Chairs responded. Although, all of the questions were not answered, many chairs offered helpful comments. These responses reveal that there is variation in interpretation about the role, responsibilities, compensation, or selection of the individuals who function as English Chair. Results of the nearly 100 responses follow.

Selection and Rank

The first question was, "As your department's chairperson, what rank do you hold?" The survey indicated that 71 per cent are professors and 23 per cent are associate professors. Additionally, one is called "head," one "assistant, and one needs "no academic rank." As to the lowest rank possible to become a chairperson, 8 per cent answered professor, 41 per cent associate, and 40 per cent assistant. Six had no policy in this regard. As to how the person achieved this position, 43 per cent stated that they were elected while 41 per cent were appointed; 17 per cent answered, "both." For the majority, the term of office is 3 years; in

a few cases, it is from 2 to 5 years. For 16 per cent of English Department Chairs, however, the length of the term of office is open; it could go on indefinitely. The chairperson can be elected or appointed an unlimited number of times in 70 per cent of the cases; for 17 per cent 2 or 3 terms is the limit. In 4 per cent of the institutions, a person can hold this position only one time.

Staff Size and Compensation

The number of full time equivalent (FTE) faculty reporting to the chair during the academic years and during the summer are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

NUMBER OF FACULTY, FTE, REPORTING TO CHAIR

FTE	Per Cent of Chairs Indicating FTE Size	
	During Academic Year	During Summer
Fewer than 10	1	29
10 to 20	16	43
21 to 30	27	3 or less
31 to 40	21	3 or less
more than 40	20	3 or less
	N = 91	N = 83

The table illustrates that only one chairperson has fewer than 10 FTE faculty members reporting to him/her during the academic year, but 29 per cent have that few in the summer. Between 10 and 20 FTE's report to 16 per cent of the chairs during the year and to 43 per cent in summer. Twenty-seven per cent of the chairs have 21 to 30 faculty and 21 per cent have

31 to 40, with 20 per cent of the chairs having more than 40 faculty, all with 3 or fewer in the summer. In one case, the department elects a summer session supervisor. The faculty who report to department chairs decline considerably during the summer months.

Regular salaries (9-10 months) for persons designated as English Department Chairs differ widely as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

REGULAR SALARY RANGE OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

Range of Salary	Per Cent of Chairs Earning
$21,000 - $30,000	7
$30,001 - $35,000	27
$35,001 - $40,000	22
$40,001 - $45,000	15
$45,001 - $50,000	8
more than $50,000	7
	N = 90

For salaries, 7 per cent of them earn from $21,000 to $30,000; 27 per cent earn between $30,001 and $35,000; 22 per cent earn from $35,001 to $40,000; 15 per cent from $40,001 to $45,000, 8 per cent from $45,001 to $50,000, and 7 per cent earn more than $50,000. The average salary of an English Department Chair is $42,985 with a range of $21,200 to $56,000.

Listed in Table 3 are the total salary ranges (regular plus supplemental) provided to chairs in relation to the amount of time they are released from teaching.

Table 3

ADJUSTED SALARY AND RELEASED TIME FOR CHAIRS BY SALARY RANGE

Ranges	Percent of Chairs Within Salary Range	Percent of Released Time For Chairs		
		25-49%	50-74%	75-100%
25,000-30,000	1.0		1.3	
30,001-35,000	13.3	5.0	6.7	
35,001-40,000	24.0	4.0	16.0	5.0
40,001-45,000	28.0	4.0	14.6	5.0
45,001-50,000	12.0	1.3	8.0	6.7
50,001-55,000	12.0	1.3	6.7	4.0
55,001-60,750	10.7	2.7	4.0	2.7
	N = 75	N = 75		

The adjusted salaries (regular on Table 2 plus supplemental on Table 5) for Department Chairs ranged from $25,000 to $60,750. The average salary for Department Chairs of institutions survey was $42,985.

Over half of the Chairs (52%) receive a salary between $35,000 to $40,000. Most of those (30.6%) are released 50-74 per cent time for Chair responsibilities. However, this indicates that most Chairs have some teaching responsibility.

Over thirty-seven per cent of the Chairs (37.4%) make over $45,000 total salary. These Chairs are released from 50-100 per cent time to carry out the responsibilities of the Chair's position.

All Chairs reported that they do receive a reduction in teaching load. This reduction ranges from 25 to 100 per cent.

Supplemental Compensation

Additional salary is provided to approximately 56 per cent of the responding department chairs on the basis of faculty size as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4

CHAIR ADDITIONAL SALARY IN RELATION TO FACULTY SIZE

Additional Salary	Faculty Size		
	0-20	21-40	41+
0 - 2,000	6	14	3
2,001 - 4,000	3	9	4
4,001 - 6,000		3	2
6,001 - 8,000		1	2
8,001 - 10,000		3	
10,001 - 12,000		2	1
12,001 - 14,000			1
N = 54	9	32	13

Of those chairs responding to this issue, (54 out of 96) approximately 60 per cent, have departments with 21-40 faculty members.

Seventy-two per cent of the chairs receive a supplemental salary of less that $4,000 for their chair responsibilities regardless of faculty size.

The range is from $600 to $14,000. The amount of stipend differs in nearly every case.

Summer Salaries

Some English Department Chairs receive their salary on a nine month basis. Thirty-six or 37 per cent received a summer salary. Ten worked during summer for no additional salary.

Table 5

SUMMER SALARY FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

Summer Salary Range	Per Cent of Chairs Receiving Summer Salary	
	N	%
0 - 2,000	8	22
2,001 - 4,000	7	19
4,001 - 6,000	4	11
6,001 - 8,000	9	25
8,001 - 10,000	4	11
10,001 - 12,000	4	11
N = 36	36	100

The additional summer salary plans vary from one month's salary to 2/9 of the academic year salary. In some cases, a straight bonus above a summer salary is paid which varies in size from $100 in one case to $2,000 in several cases. Of the 36 chairs reporting receiving a summer salary or summer salary plus bonus, most receive less that $10,000 for summer teaching and chair responsibilities. This indicates that most receive approximately less than $5,000 per month for summer employment which tends to equate monthly salaries for the academic year.

A large percentage did not respond to this question which indicates that many chairs are on a 12 month contract.

Fringe Benefits

The last item on the questionnaire had to do with extra monies handled by the chair and as expected no two answers were alike, but most chairs receive funds for program and staff development. Travel monies are made available on the basis of need, number of faculty involved, papers to be given and/or on a prescribed dollar allocation. Several departments have endowments and foundation funds that can be utilized for special projects. Some endowments are very small and range to as much as $30,000.

Role Responsibilities

Table 6

CHAIRPERSON'S PRIORITIZATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibility Indicators	Priority rank		
	High 1-5	Med 6-11	Low 12-16
A. Advocate for Department Needs	x		
B. Personnel Action	x		
C. Advisor to Dean	x		
D. Supervision of Office Skills	x		
E. Handling of Department Funds	x		
F. Scholar Researcher		x	
G. Assessing, Evaluating, Promoting Curriculum		x	
H. Delegation of Assignment to Faculty in Department		x	
I. Handling Student Problems		x	
J. Representing Administration to Faculty and Vice Versa		x	
K. Recruiting, Maintaining, Upgrading Faculty		x	
L. Building Morale Among Faculty		x	
M. Facilitator of Department Programs		x	
N. Recruiting Students into Department Programs			x
O. Teaching Students			x
P. Grants Person			x

Indicators considered high by department chairs were ranked in the first five of sixteen role responsibilities. Conversely, those considered least important were ranked 12 through 16 of 16 tasks. Therefore, it appears as though department chairs see their major important tasks as being an advisor, supervisor, personnel officer and advocate. Least important task/job responsibilities are believed to be teacher, recruiter and grant writer. Those tasks seen as being of average or medium importance tended to spread across the importance table in wide array, i.e., all tasks were ranked high by some chairs, low by other and clustered in mid range by most chairs.

Responsibilities receiving high priority by department chair are personnel work, advising the dean and handling student problems; low priorities include recruiting students, teaching students, and serving as a grants person. Several of the responsibilities were evenly distributed along the priority scale.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what is the role of the English Department Chair is in universities with student enrollments between 5,000 and 12,000. While there appears to be a variation in interpretation about the role, responsibilities, compensation, or selection of the individuals who serve and function as English Department chairs, noteworthy patterns of behavior were evidenced in this study.

Specifically, chairs reporting in this study tend to administer departments ranging in size from 8 to 61 during the academic year depending upon the size of the institution and its commitment to

preparation in English Studies. Their term of office tends to run for a three year period with most being selected. A few, however, were chosen by the appointment process. In most situations, chairs may be reelected an unlimited number of times. For the most part, chairs are expected to hold the rank of associate or full professor.

The number of full time equivalent faculty (FTE) reporting to the chair during the academic year ranged from 10 to more than 40. During the summer sessions, the FTE in departments drop drastically indicating that most departments have minimal course offerings during the summer months.

Regular salaries for department chairs ranged from $21,200 to $56,000 with a mean annual salary for the academic year approximating $42,985 or slightly less than $5,000 per month. Over half of the respondents were well within the $35,000 to $45,000 range.

It appears that as the chairs salary increases so does the provision of released time for accomplishing chair responsibilities. However, it is noteworthy that in most instances the chair continues to teach at least part time, much like the headmaster of old. All chairs do have some released time to accomplish their responsibilities.

While approximately half of the chairs also receive some supplemental compensation for performing chair duties, the size of the supplement tends to be relatively small, i.e., in most cases the supplemental stipend is less than $4,000.

Approximately one-third of the chairs also received a summer stipend, though 10% worked during the summer with no summer compensation. Summer sessions tend to operate for two employment months and those receiving a

summer allocation/bonus were awarded less than $10,000 or less than $5,000 per month, an amount that tends to equal the average monthly academic year salary.

Fringe benefits (PERKS) come in various forms ranging from travel monies to funds for special projects and for staff and program development. No consistent fringe benefit allocation pattern was present.

English Department Chairs serve many roles in the university setting including functioning as: a scholar and researcher, a promoter of the scholarly effort, a maintainer of high standards, an extension of an important part of the faculty, an arm of the administration in a leadership role, an instructor and manager. Universities depend upon their chairs for work in public relations. Some chairs are expected to represent the department in the community; others articulate with local high school English Departments, write press releases, serve on the Alumni Advisory Board, and/or maintain the integrity of the major. Several chairs find themselves acting as counselors. They advise undergraduates and graduate students or hold the hands of colleagues going through divorce, death in the family, or mid-life crises.

Responsibilities receiving high priority by department chairs are personnel work, advising the dean and handling student problems; low priorities include recruiting students, teaching students, and serving as a grants person. Several of the responsibilities investigated by this study were evenly distributed along the priority scale.

Conclusions

Chairs walk a "tight rope" between being a representative of the

faculty or an arm of the university administration. Although they perform essentially the same number and kinds of duties, the amount of released time and extra compensation has great variance. Therefore, there appears to be little correlation between role expectations and the provision of time to perform the role or the monetary value attached to the performance of that role. While role tends not to be a definer, salary and time does appear to have a positive relationship. As the salary increases, the amount of released time also increases. Contradictorily, there is not a positive relationship between "extra" compensation and size of department, i.e., as the department size increases, the amount of extra compensation does not increase.

The vast number of duties being performed by chairs reporting in this study would indicate that most are overworked. The salaries they report suggest that most are underpaid or at least are receiving salary that is not tied in any meaningful way to the job expectations, job size or job responsibilities. Surely their value to their university cannot be underestimated by anyone--faculty, administration, or the general public.

Recommendations

For those interested in clarifying role expectations and improving working conditions for their department chairs, attention should be given to the wide diversity of tasks that must be accomplished by each Chair and the time it takes to function in a colleagual mileau. The departmental Chair should be a prestigious position within any university. The position requires a master of many complex and complicated responsibilities. The Chair succeeds because of the ability to import many skills and experiences

as a former staff member. Several recommendations follow as guidelines to those who desire to establish a reasonable work load with appropriate compensation for their Departmental Chairs.

1. The prioritization of tasks for the Chair is indispensable to the chair and departmental success. Chairs should work with their departments to prioritize those responsibilities.

2. The role conflict issue of being administration or faculty must be resolved for each Chair's position. Once resolved, the chair should be expected to provide leadership that results in program quality, departmental marketing and a satisfied faculty and student population.

3. A program must be designed to continuously upgrade the human relations and administrative skills of each chair. A three year plan for chair improvement should be tied to local departmental needs.

4. Chairs who are expected to function as counselors need to be trained to do so or assigned trained counselor support staff.

5. Supplemental funds targeted at faculty growth experiences need to be provided for chair allocation.

6. A relationship formula must be established when determining compensation and supplemental compensation that designs a linkage between role expectations, the amount of released time, with equivalent consideration being given to the number of faculty who are expected to report to the Chair.

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